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## A Message from the Navy Surgeon General: Suicide Prevention

Filed under COMMUNITY SUPPORT, FAMILIES, LEADERSHIP

(NO COMMENTS)

**By Vice Adm. Matthew L. Nathan, U.S. Navy surgeon general and chief, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery**



I despair when I hear that of one of our Sailors or Marines has taken his or her own life. These are tragedies where we must intervene somehow and somewhere in the chain of events that leads to the hopelessness of suicide, be it impulsive or the culmination of chronic thoughts. Recently I asked our Navy Medicine leaders to delve deeper across the enterprise and work to identify risk factors for suicide and recommend potential points of intervention. We can —and will —do more to prevent suicide by being responsible to those we serve.

Preventing suicide requires each of us to actively participate and be engaged in the lives our shipmates and colleagues. It starts with a concept many of you have heard me talk about: “Ship, Shipmate and Self.” I encourage you to take time out of your day to listen to your shipmates, be there for them, ask them how they are doing — it all adds up and may make a difference to one of them. We especially must connect with our Sailors who are transitioning from one job to another, experiencing career setbacks like school failures or failing to promote, experiencing disciplinary action or going through some sort of loss, divorce or relationship breakups. We must break the code of silence and initiate the conversation, making sure our Sailors know they are never alone.

Each September, the Department of Defense recognizes Suicide Prevention Month. The theme of this year’s Navy Suicide Prevention Month is, “[Thrive in Your Community.](#)”

This year’s theme focuses on partnering with your fellow Sailors and Marines in projects across our community. The increasing sense of community and purpose is an important protective factor in preventing suicide. By helping others, we help ourselves. Those who are present for others are often more open to receive assistance when needed. A sense of community can help us not just survive, but also thrive in the face of adversity. The sense of belonging may provide a person in distress with a lifeline they didn’t know they had.

Whether you are active duty or civilian, clinician, administrator, or corpsman, you have several valuable resources available to you to support our Sailors, Marines, veterans, and their families in our efforts to promote resiliency and prevent suicidal behaviors. The Navy

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and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) provides tools and resources to help Sailors and Marines build and maintain resiliency, through operational stress control, stress navigation, anger management, proper sleep and the prevention of drug abuse and excessive alcohol use resources. An example is the recently released “[Relax Relax toolkit](#)” designed for Sailors and Marines to reduce stress and optimize performance through deep relaxation techniques. The toolkit includes sections on breathing techniques, muscle relaxation, imagery, meditation, mindfulness, music, and combination strategies.

Additionally, the Navy Leader's Guide for Managing Sailors in Distress is a resource to help leaders recognize distress related behaviors, provide support to Sailors, and link distressed individuals with appropriate and timely help and information. Navy Medicine also partners and collaborates with other Department of the Navy organizations including the Navy Suicide Prevention Program, the Marine Corps Suicide Prevention Program, and the Navy Operational Stress Control (OSC) Program to create awareness of suicide risk factors and warning signs and to develop suicide prevention resources and products.

Suicide cannot be an option for anyone. Family, faith, and a sense of belonging all matter....and yes, for many, the Navy may be the only real family they know. By coming together through unit and family cohesion, we can strengthen resilience and serve as protectors of our shipmates. We must look out for our “Ship, Shipmate, and Self.”

Together we can make a difference in preventing suicide. When I get a report, I wish I had just one more day to make a difference, one more day to see the signs...but I didn't get that day, so I make each day count so I won't need that last one. I ask you to be there for every Sailor, every day. We owe it to them, to ourselves, and to the mission. So go out of your way to be an engaged shipmate – practice compassion – ask your shipmates how they are doing and REALLY listen. Maybe you got that one more day...and maybe you saved a life.

Additional NMCPHC suicide prevention resources are available at <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/psychological-emotional-wellbeing/Pages/suicide-prevention.aspx>, as well as the Navy Suicide Prevention program: [http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS-NPC/support/21st\\_century\\_sailor/suicide\\_prevention/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.public.navy.mil/BUPERS-NPC/support/21st_century_sailor/suicide_prevention/Pages/default.aspx).

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